



The Congo Crisis in World Affairs

Author(s): Arnold RIVKIN

Source: *Civilisations*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (1960), pp. 473-479

Published by: [Institut de Sociologie de l'Université de Bruxelles](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41230711>

Accessed: 17/06/2014 07:24

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Institut de Sociologie de l'Université de Bruxelles is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Civilisations*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

DOCUMENTS

The Congo Crisis in World Affairs

Arnold RIVKIN

As long ago as 1885 the major powers of the day recognized the special position of Africa, and particularly Central Africa, in the struggles of the major powers. The Berlin Conference on Africa of 1884-85 was attended by the principal world powers, including tsarist Russia. The United States, which was emerging on the world scene, attended the Conference but unlike Russia was not a signatory to its final act — the Act of Berlin of 1885.

The Act, *inter alia*, laid down a set of ground rules to govern the European division and occupation of Africa generally. The bulk of the Act however, relates to the Congo Basin territories. With respect to these territories there is a «declaration relative to (their) neutrality». Article X provides for the neutrality of the territories of such metropolitan countries as declare themselves to be neutrals, and more to the point, Article XI provides for the neutrality of the territories in the event of war between the signatories to the Act.

This early design for the neutrality of the Congo Basin territories provides an interesting precedent and background for the current attempt to keep the Congo crisis out of the Cold War.

From the outset of the Congo crisis in early July it has been the studied purpose of the free world nations to insulate the crisis from the cold war. The United States refused the invitation of the Congo government (and there was at the time, early July, only one) to intervene, and referred the invitation to the United Nations. It was clear to the United States, as it was to other free world nations and many Afro-Asian states, that the mutiny of the *Force Publique*, the break-down of any semblance of law and order, the onset of a reign of terror, and the impending collapse of the total structure of the new state was enough of a hornets nest and threat to world peace without superimposing the ideological and power struggle between the free world and the communist bloc. The Soviet Union reacted otherwise. While holding aloft the banner of peaceful coexistence with one hand in its fratricidal doctrinal struggle with Communist China, with the other it was supplying the government of

* Material in this article has been drawn from a series of recent lectures and papers by the author on the international aspects of the Congo crisis. It was received by the Institute on 28th October, 1960.

the Congo with critical military transport and technical cadres to maintain it *outside* the United Nations channel through which all other nations (other than Belgium) were sending their aid to the Congo, and which the UN Security Council resolution, initially authorizing intervention and the subsequent resolution amplifying the authorization, could be said to have contemplated as the exclusive channel. At a minimum it was understood at the UN that military forces for Congo duty would not be drawn from any of the five permanent members of the Security Council. The *only* reason for this inhibition was the explicit desire of the United States and, at the time, it was thought, of all states, to quarantine the Congo crisis from further infection by the cold war virus. The Soviet Union's decision to circumvent at least the spirit, if not the letter, belied this thought. The cold war was after all, as a conscious matter, to be introduced into the Congo crisis by the Communist bloc.

The Security Council subsequently attempted to make specific what had theretofore been clearly implied — the UN channel was to be the exclusive one for military forces and equipment flowing to the Congo. The Soviet veto, in defiance of world opinion, blocked such a declaration. The General Assembly, in a rare show of unanimity on what had now become a major cold war issue, voted 70-0 for localizing the Congo crisis and excluding the cold war. The bloc abstained in the embarrassing company of «colonial» France and apartheid South Africa. Such neutralist nations as Guinea, Ghana, the United Arab Republic, India, Indonesia, and Yugoslavia *all* sided with the free world. The cold war was to be excluded from the Congo. There were, to be sure, many nuances and caveats implicit in the motivations of many neutralist states in voting against communist bloc intrusion in the Congo. Nevertheless, the net effect of the «shut-out» vote could be viewed only as a world wide vote against the reckless determination of the bloc to bring the world to the brink of Armageddon by introducing the cold war into the Congo.

II

The Soviet decision to provide military transport to Prime Minister Lumumba's government for the Kasai campaign by itself, and as a prelude to an analogous one in Katanga, touched off President Kasavubu's abortive coup in early September to unseat Lumumba and replace him with the President of the Senate, Joseph Ileo. What Kasavubu succeeded in doing was creating a second government. The Soviet decision, apparently reached in secret with Lumumba, when discovered by Kasavubu, caused him to react forcefully against what appeared to be a Lumumba-Soviet bloc conspiracy to take over the weak fledgling Congolese Government. The Kasai campaign with its many excesses (characterized by the Secretary-General of the UN as genocide) and the threatened campaign in Katanga could only have served to alarm Kasavubu who in uneasy alliance with Lumumba, in the face of growing vocal opposition in his own party, the Abako, was keeping in check the strong separatist tendencies of the Bakongo people throughout the Lower Congo. Kasavubu acted ineffectively. The internal crisis mounted. The UN administration on the spot, in pursuance of its internally inconsistent mandate to restore law and order but not to interfere in internal Congolese affairs, took a hand, and by denying

Lumumba access to the Leopoldville radio and the airports throughout the Congo smothered further Lumumba military operations and froze the disposition of what remained of the reconstituted Force Publique.

The effect of the UN action — intended or otherwise — was to isolate Lumumba in Leopoldville, and strengthen the position of the Kasavubu-Ileo government in Leopoldville, the Tshombe government in Katanga, and the aspiration of Chief Kalonji in the «mining state» he proclaimed in the South Kasai. This was particularly the case with Katanga which continued to receive Belgian military assistance during the period outside the UN channel. Hence, the very act of the United Nations in choking off the incipient civil war constituted a *de facto* interference in the internal affairs in the Congo and strengthened the federalist and separatist groups.

Failure by the UN to act, however, would have had the effect of furthering the civil strife and abetting the campaign of genocide being waged against the Baluba people of the Kasai. Such acts of omission might equally be viewed as interference by the UN — this time on the side of Lumumba in his attempt to resolve the constitutional crisis involving the secession of Katanga and the rebellion in the Kasai by force of arms. As a brief aside at this point, it is interesting to note that President Nkrumah, who threatened to withdraw Ghanaian troops from the UN command in protest over the UN «intervention against Lumumba», simultaneously impaled himself on the other horn of the dilemma by declaring that the Katanga secession issue could not be resolved by force. He went so far as to suggest publicly that he might fly to Elisabethville to see Premier Tshombe in an attempt to mediate the constitutional dispute.

Neither Lumumba or Kasavubu appeared to have the strength to find a way out of the deadlock that ensued. At his point, Colonel Mobutu, who theretofore was a relatively inconspicuous Lumumba-oriented personality, appeared on the scene and ordered a cease fire throughout the Force Publique, which much to everybody's surprise was generally obeyed. He then constituted a special administration or commission of college students to «administer» the country as non-party technicians, independently of both the Lumumba and Kasavubu-Ileo governments. Mobutu declared both governments to be «neutralized», and announced that the commission of students would insist on a truce on political activities through December 31st. Meetings of the National Parliament were also to be suspended through the end of the year.

The Congo «strongman», Colonel Mobutu, however, appears to have lacked the strength to impose this truce on the warring political factions. In fact, what he succeeded in doing was creating a third government, which, in many ways, including some of its principal personnel derived from the Kasavubu-Ileo government (and before that from the Lumumba government), tended by force of circumstances to closer adherence to Kasavubu than to Lumumba. Colonel Mobutu has called for a roundtable in Leopoldville of all Congolese factions with a view to finding a formula for a compromise government which would resolve the principal constitutional crisis and lift the Congo from the political morass into which it has plunged. The success of this latest initiative, including the very convocation of the meeting, will inevitably be influenced by the

external forces at play in the Congo, including the attitude of the United Nations towards it. Lumumba's attitude will certainly reflect, *inter alia*, the support of the bloc. It will also reflect the support, or lack of it, from the independent African states, discussed below. Similarly Kasavubu and Mobutu will be affected by the bloc position and that of the independent African states, as well as by the general UN position and the position of the free world. The external impingements will affect all participants at the roundtable and at any alternative or successive meeting which may be convoked in an attempt to reconcile the various Congolese factions.

There could still be, however, effective exclusion of *direct* participation by the principal cold war antagonists beyond what has already occurred. The Soviet and Czech Embassies and technical-military missions have already been ignominiously withdrawn from the Congo under the guns and at the command of Col. Mobutu ; the United States from the inception of the crisis has sought to keep the cold war out of the situation. If the independent African states do not insist, in pursuit of their differing interests, on intruding in the internal struggles for power, there is still a substantial chance of localizing the crisis. All-out support of Lumumba by the African States directly or through pressure exerted within the UN framework could lead to civil war and end up playing the Soviet game. Competition among African states for the inside track in the Pan-African sweepstake being run in the Congo as well as elsewhere in Africa could also lead to disastrous confusion and conflict, from which once again only the communist bloc could gain.

III

Tunisia, more than any other African state, appears to have assessed the dangerous potential of the Congo crisis, and has made herculean efforts at the Security Council, of which it is the African member, at the Pan-African conference of political representatives in Leopoldville during August, and as a member of the UN emergency mission in the Congo, to internalize the Congo crisis. Tunisia has in large degree avoided the pitfalls which Ghana particularly among the African states has fallen into, of committing itself to one faction so deeply that it has lost much of its effectiveness with all the others and most of its capacity for maneuver. Repeatedly now, President Kasavubu and Colonel Mobutu have asked the UN for the recall of Ghanaian (and also Guinean) troops from the Congo. President Nkrumah's numerous indiscretions — not the least of which were in personal letters to Prime Minister Lumumba seized by Colonel Mobutu when he flittingly arrested Lumumba — have made Nkrumah and Ghana suspect in the eyes of Kasavubu and Mobutu. After all for the head of one state (Nkrumah) to accuse the head of another (Kasavubu) of «treachery» to his country in a letter to his political rival (Lumumba) is not likely to endear him to the accused or his friends.

The «steady» influence of the Congo often proclaimed, especially by the Secretary of Commonwealth Relations of the United Kingdom, has been of a very special character. Nkrumah has, like most other new African leaders, repeatedly declared the UN to be the foundation stone of the foreign policy of his country. He is deeply committed to the UN as the world's

leading instrument for peace, especially for the new states. In fact, UN membership more than any other single factor, has become the indicia of sovereignty and the touchstone of independence for the new African states.

Nkrumah also has a deep suspicion of anything and everything which might be construed as colonialist or imperialist. In addition, Nkrumah has an abiding distrust of federalism, diffusion of power, and local autonomy. These are signs of weakness and detract from the strength of the leader of a new African state. At home Nkrumah set himself the task of crushing all internal opposition — traditional or otherwise. A strong unitary state has been his answer to the problem of stability in political affairs. Finally, Nkrumah has ambitions to be the Pan-African leader who welds together a large bloc of Africa. He is in competition with others for the leadership role, particularly with his associate in the Ghana-Guinea «nucleus of union», President Sékou Touré of Guinea. It is not only the leadership role which is at stake, but also the differing brands of Pan-Africanism being advocated by the competing leaders.

The conflicting commitments — to the UN, to Lumumba as anti-colonial pro-unitary strong-man in the Congo contest of power, to his own Pan-African aspirations — have led President Nkrumah to play a balancing game in the Congo. First one and then another of these interests or commitments has been favored. The result has been somewhat self-abnegating, with perhaps more effective support to the forces working to limit external intrusion in the Congo crisis than to those who would intrude for one reason or another. Ghana was one of the 70 voting for the General Assembly resolution to internalize the crisis. Nkrumah also proclaimed a «Monroe Doctrine for Africa», assigning to the African states the duty to exclude outside interference in Africa, and implicitly the right to interfere in one another's affairs, for simultaneously Nkrumah was doing just this with his support to Lumumba, and his deprecation of other Congolese leaders.

Guinea has been less ostentatious about its role in the Congo, but no less active in interfering in the internal political situation on behalf of the Lumumba faction. Guinea and its leader Sékou Touré have all of the interest and commitments comparable to those of Ghana and Nkrumah in the Congo. Sékou Touré would like to gain adhesion of the Congo to his own brand of Pan-Africanism which seeks in addition to welding together a bloc of African states in a power complex with certain social revolutionary objectives involving the total reordering of African society within the frame-work of a one-party state.

Guinea also bridges the gap between African nationalism and the Soviet Union's pseudo-nationalism which has on several occasions during the Congo-crisis cast Khrushchev in the counter-productive role of being more African than the Africans. Certainly in the 70-0 General Assembly vote Khrushchev lead the bloc into a *cul-de-sac* from which he has been desperately trying to extricate it by increasingly virulent assaults on colonialism, imperialism, the Secretary-General of the UN, the West, and just about anything else that came to hand. On this occasion even Sékou Touré had to abandon him temporarily, or was allowed to, to preserve his future usefulness as an African nationalist leader.

The United Arab Republic has followed the general Ghana-Guinea line of supporting Lumumba but in a lower key. President Nasser has attempted to stay clear of the Nkrumah—Sékou Touré struggle to dominate Lumumba's government, and also to avoid another head-on clash with Nkrumah for leadership of the Pan-African competition. Several previous encounters with Nkrumah have served to dull Nasser's appetite for a direct confrontation.

Morocco has also had an important role which has fallen somewhere in between that of Tunisia at one end of the spectrum and Guinea at the other. Morocco has never been anywhere as committed as Ghana or Guinea to Lumumba personally. On the contrary, Morocco has as the leading African military component in the UN emergency force remained steadfastly committed to the UN, despite an apparent ideological preference for Lumumba. It is likely that, at the outset at any rate, Morocco through its General Kettani was the inspiration, if not the architect, of the attempted Mobutu compromise coup. There are now definite indications that Colonel Mobutu, having failed to achieve a military breakthrough to a political solution, may find himself expendable in the eyes of General Kettani and others in the continuing inter-African tug of war.

All the other African states represented in the UN force have played relatively minor roles and in general have supported the position of the Secretary-General. A new factor in the situation has appeared with the presence of Nigerian contingents for the first time, following Nigeria's accession to independence on October 1st. Nigeria may well provide the steadying influence so urgently required to make possible a peace-making, non-interventionist type role by the African bloc. If it does, the Congo may be spared the ultimate disaster which now appears to be awaiting it, and preserve what remains of the dwindling opportunity to find a formula for containing the cold war insofar as Africa is concerned, and in the process lay a basis for a world-wide détente.

IV

The foregoing analysis suggests that the UN framework remains the best possible one within which to handle the Congo crisis. In fact, no satisfactory alternative exists. It also suggests the UN's basic limitations which it would be dangerous and even foolhardy to ignore. The UN is not greater than the sum of all of its parts or even at times equal to the sum of its parts. In the instant case — the Congo crisis — the UN is distinctly less than the sum of its parts. The communist bloc, so clearly isolated in the General Assembly vote, is an internal fifth column in the Congo case, which must be accepted as a *sine qua non* of the UN structure. Among the crucial African states in the UN there are the bloc-conscious states of Guinea (ideological bloc-consciousness) and the United Arab Republic (pragmatic bloc-consciousness). There are too, as suggested above, a variety of national purposes among the African states which may cause their actions within the UN at one time to coincide, and at another to diverge from the official UN position of non-interference in the internal political affairs and struggle for power in the Congo.

The UN majority coalition is thus subject to shifting winds which may yet reach gale proportions in the Congo crisis. One need only recall the autumn-

al madness of 1956 in the Suez crisis which found the United States and the Soviet Union aligned in the Security Council against the United Kingdom and France. The Security Council directive to Belgium in early July to withdraw its troops from the Congo had something of the sound of an attenuated echo of an earlier UN directive to the United Kingdom and France to withdraw their troops from Suez.

Finally, it would be imprudent to believe any longer that the mere UN presence in a political controversy is enough to resolve it, or at any rate to subdue it. The truce team mentality carried over by the UN emergency mission into the Congo from the Near East is inapposite in an internal struggle for political power. The quintessence of the dispute in the Congo is the internal struggle for power which by definition the truce team mentality precludes from the orbit of possible action or even concern by the UN. The situation is even more serious. Not only the truce team mentality but the whole posture of the UN in the Congo crisis is one of non-interference in the internal affairs of the Congo. Yet what could be more of the essence of internal affairs than the restoration and maintenance of law and order. The UN has been in the untenable position in the Congo of standing on the sidelines during tribal wars which were denominated «internal», and therefore, *ultra vires* for the UN, particularly when these wars were even more vicious than usual because of a political coloration given to them by Lumumba or Tshombe while at the same time the UN was concerned to protect by-standers not directly parties to the tribal wars who might accidentally get caught up in the conflicts.

Obviously in practice the UN by actions or omissions will influence or affect internal affairs, and by so doing will provoke the outraged protests of partisans of one side or the other. Only a definite mandate delineating a positive role for the UN forces — military and civil — in the Congo is likely to be adequate to finding a durable solution of the internal conflict. Given the composition of the UN and its majority coalition little more than the significant exclusive channel and internalization resolution already adopted is likely to eventuate. This achievement is not to be minimized. It provides an opportunity to exclude much of the cold war controversy during which time an informal UN initiative may help find a short-range compromise solution for the internal struggle. Preservation of the opportunity, in the face of all the special interests impinging on the Congo crisis from outside, including bloc conspiracies, inter-African intrigues, the special Belgian interest, especially in Katanga, and its own impatience, must be the goal of free world policy.

If this tranquillizing affect is achieved it should be regarded not as the end of the free world's interest but rather as a starting point for the free world to help the Congolese rebuild their social structure and build a new nation-state responsive to their needs and aspirations, and compatible with a continent of independent African states free to concentrate on their own internal development without fear of outside intrusion or distraction. The political stability and economic growth of the Congo, the geopolitical heartland of Africa, is critical for the future development of the whole continent. The 1885 concept calling for neutralization of the Congo Basin would still seem to have vitality today. The precedent would seem to be in point.